CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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LETTER DATED 2 SEPTEMBER 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF NORWAY ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT TRANSMITTING THE TEXT OF "AN INTERNATIONAL AGENDA ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS: ELEMENTS OF A COMMON UNDERSTANDING" FROM THE OSLO MEETING ON SMALL ARMS, 13-14 JULY 1998

I have the honour to transmit to you "An International Agenda on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Elements of a Common Understanding" from the Oslo meeting on Small Arms, 13-14 July 1998.

I would be grateful if the necessary arrangements could be made for its distribution as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament to all members and participating non-member state delegations.

(Signed) Bjørn Skogmo
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

GE.98-63494

The Oslo Meeting on Small Arms, 13 - 14 July 1998

An International Agenda on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Elements of a Common Understanding

Concerns and Challenges

A number of states, recognizing the problems caused by the excessive availability, accumulation and uncontrolled proliferation of small arms and light weapons, met in Oslo 13 and 14 July, 1998, in order to discuss the humanitarian, developmental, and security concerns raised by this issue. In many societies, excessive accumulation and criminal use of these weapons contribute to violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes, and abuse of human rights. They threaten security, exacerbate violence, increase human suffering and hinder socio-economic development and political stability. They also constitute an obstacle to the implementation of peace agreements, the development of a culture of peace and are an impediment to meaningful development cooperation. A sizable portion of all transfers of small arms and light weapons is illicit and increasingly linked to other transnational criminal activities, and there is a considerable "grey trade".

Due to its complexity the problem will have to be pursued and solutions sought in different fora and in a variety of ways. Governments bear the primary responsibility for addressing these issues. It is therefore encouraging to note the increasing number of governmental initiatives.

Governments recognize that civil society in general and NGOs in particular contribute to our work. They acknowledge the important role of NGOs in conducting and disseminating research, doing field studies, educating the public, providing advise to governments on small arms issues and in delivering humanitarian relief to war-torn societies.

Actions to be taken

Immediate action could focus on the *prevention* of illicit transfers and tighter control in connection with legal transfers. The great number of casualties and the extent of human suffering caused by the use of small arms in war-torn societies point to the urgent need for the *reduction* of such weapons in these situations of conflict.

Prevention aspects

- Enhanced accountability, transparency and improved information exchange on small arms transfers; improved control mechanisms at their manufacture, transit and transfer,

including export and import licenses and notification of shipments. Notification of country of origin after identification of unlawful small arms holdings. Regular information exchange. Strengthen adherence to UN embargoes.

- Cooperation, coordination, training and information sharing among police, intelligence units and customs officials within and between countries.
- Developing and strengthening laws and regulations; increase capacity to combat illicit manufacturing and trafficking; ensure strict enforcement of appropriate laws and regulations on civilian possession of small arms; improve traceability of small arms possession and transfers, e.g. through improved marking.
- Respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law with regard to the use of small arms and light weapons; explore possibilities to strengthen international humanitarian law.
- Develop national and regional mechanisms including codes of conduct in connection with the legal manufacturing, transit, transfers and, where appropriate, reduction of small arms and light weapons.

Reduction aspects

- Support the demobilization and reintegration of combatants at the end of armed conflict, including income generating activities. Collection, safe storage and/or destruction of 'surplus' military weapons and weapons not legally held. Voluntary programs for weapons collection. Integration of these issues into peace accords.
- Seek to reverse cultures of violence. Demilitarization of societies. Contribute to processes of reconciliation.
- Support efforts to establish trustworthy judicial and penal systems and to train local police. Support security sector reform in post-conflict societies.

The process ahead

The participating states believe that in order to address these problems effectively and coherently, governments need to intensify and harmonize the efforts that have been made. This includes the need to develop further a common understanding of the issues as well as of practical ways of approaching the problems presented by small arms and light weapons.

We recognize the important role of the United Nations in global efforts. Governments need to pursue their priorities in global, regional, sub-regional and national settings in a coherent manner. We encourage other governments to participate in common efforts to find practical solutions to these problems. At this point in time regional and subregional arrangements seem to be particularly promising. We also recognize the need for international cooperation, i.a. with regard to meeting resource and technology requirements.

We welcome and commend the various endeavours currently being undertaken in different areas and at different levels. Governments are encouraged to support the existing global and regional initiatives - such as those listed in Annex I - and explore the feasibility of further initiatives, globally and in other regions and subregions.

Annex I

Global and regional initiatives:

- The UN Secretary General's Report on Small Arms of 1997
- The UN Group of Governmental Experts on Small Arms
- The UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice: Planned Transnational Organised Crime Convention, Protocol on Firearms
- Proposed International Conference on the Illicit Arms Trade in all its Aspects
- The Interamerican Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Their Component Parts
- The OAS/CICAD Model Regulations for the Control of the International Movement of Firearms, their Parts, Components and Ammunition
- The Mali Proposal on a Moratorium on the Manufacture, Export and Import of Light Weapons in West Africa
- The OSCE Principles Governing Conventional Arms Transfers
- The OECD/DAC Guidelines on Conflict, Peace and Development
- The EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports
- The EU Programme for Preventing and Combating Illicit Trafficking in Conventional Arms